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THE CASE OF LITERATURE. II

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II. TREATMENT

Vive, vale. Si quid novisti rectius istis,
Candidus imperti; si non, his utere mecum.

I propose by way of remedy to overturn no idols. What I have been criticizing is not so much the system of graduate study as the spirit in which it is conducted, and the false conception of scholarship which it is allowed to foster. I propose only a shifting of emphasis to the proper place by those who are responsible for leadership in the teaching of literature. Let the center of literary instruction, ancient and modern, be literature, and literature abundantly.

I do not mean by this the omission of the study or the teaching of the various branches of knowledge which enter into literary content, or have to do with its history; but I do mean the subjection of them all to literature, the use of them merely as a means to an end, and that end the interpretation and appropriation of literature. Let us aim at this end directly, and cease to pay more attention to the trimmings than to the robe itself. Let us recognize and confess that the material with which specialization in literature deals is rarely essential, even when it is interesting or profitable to the investigator and his friends, and that in both undergraduate and graduate instruction it is far more likely to obscure than to illumine the subject of literature.

First, then, let us have fewer undergraduate courses. Let there be broad courses limited in number which as nearly as possible all students shall take—courses which, with rare exceptions, set before them literature which is worth while for its own sake, and not merely for the sake of making the course exhaustive (that first infirmity of the specialist mind), or for the sake of what it tells about the history of literature, or archaeology, or phonetics; courses which present authors who are significant literary personalities, not a series of fragments of no value in themselves, nor mutilated selections serving to

illustrate movements and influences. These things are interesting and profitable, but only as they contribute to the main purpose; they are infinitely damaging when made ends in themselves. A single course, given on broad lines, ought to give the undergraduate all the information that is good for him regarding the movements of literary history, and without sacrificing the main purpose of acquainting him with the best literature. A historical course in which the reading of good literature is not by far the major activity will be a failure. Ask a student what he thinks of such a course, and the answer will be illuminating—if he is not your student.

Secondly, let us cease to multiply our graduate courses also, and let it be understood that those which are given are subordinate to the main purpose—the interpretation and appropriation of literature. Let the seminary stand for overwhelming interest in literature, or let it cease to demand practically all the student's time. And when the candidate comes up for examination, let the examiner test his powers of interpretation, and ascertain whether he possesses real familiarity with his authors and has made them his own. If he is a candidate in foreign language either ancient or modern, let him be held responsible for the ready translation, elucidation, and appropriate comment on any of the important works in his field, whether read in course or not.

But what of the dissertation? If the professor or the student has in mind a subject of real importance whose investigation will be of service both to the investigator and the world, by all means a dissertation, for the training and experience of a good dissertation form one of the greatest factors in the education of both the scholar and the teacher. But in branches of learning which are so mature and full of dignity that they no longer serve as fields for infant exploitation, the professor and the student should be excused from inventing a theme whose elaboration is bound to be barren of all except disciplinary results because it is called into being to satisfy the demands of a system, and is therefore insincere and perfunctory. It may be all right to give a senior a few weeks of thesis discipline, but the amount of time demanded by the dissertation is too great to be thrown away on mere convention.

In other words, it is at least worth considering whether we should

not do both the graduate and his field of learning more good if we regarded the system as made for the man, and not the man for the system. If the candidate is not yet prepared to write something original which is worth while, why compel him to write something original which is *not* worth while, at an expense of time which prejudices his future work because it robs him of the opportunity to broaden himself? If we are confronted by the alternative of assigning either a subject not absolutely virgin which will do the student good, or one which will result in original but trivial scholarship, let us not sacrifice to the fetich of research the potential four-square scholar and teacher of twenty years hence.

Instead of taking for granted that the candidate already knows, or by some undefined process will get to know, the great common field of knowledge, instead of assuming that the raw recruit can be a rival or companion investigator with a veteran of life and learning, why not face the fact that he is rarely capable of investigating for anyone's good but his own, try to realize a little more fully that where there is no vision the specialist perishes, and drop the seductive fiction that the requirement of printed dissertations will result in dissertations fit to be printed? Give him a subject which will compel him to read and assimilate wholesome literature instead of to search the files of musty magazines and paw over scrapheaps of erudition that long since went the way to dusty death.

Let the dissertation serve the twofold purpose of educating the student in his chosen field and of developing his stylistic excellence. Let discipline in accuracy, exhaustiveness, and method be incidental to the main purpose. It is the worst kind of psychology to assume that the student knows the general field because it has already been entered and explored, and to send him groping about its dark corners in the expectation that he will find something which will do someone else good, while he has not yet charted for himself the main territory. Instead of encouraging, or rather forcing the graduate to neglect the long line of dramatic literature while he is delving among débris for evidence of the mask in the time of Menander, let him acquire by conquest of his own his ancient and modern dramatists.

By conquest. There may be on the common dining-table of

scholarship abundance of literature and of books full of appreciations of men and things and movements and influences; but they are not the property of the individual until he has reached out after them and possessed himself of them. His field is a land of promise, and though all the world beside may possess it, and though generations before him may have possessed it, it is not his own until he has fought his way into it.

Was du ererbt von deinen Vätern hast,
Erwirb es, um es zu besitzen!

But someone objects: is the work of the graduate to be no different from that of the undergraduate? I once heard it said of a professor that the difference between his undergraduate and seminary courses in the same author was that on his way to the undergraduate course he wore a derby, and on his way to the seminary a top hat. I would have the difference amount to more than this, though I sympathize with the principle. But there should be no change of front, no essential difference. The work of interpretation and appropriation should continue, only in a broader and deeper way. The seminary and the dissertation should be made the vehicle of it. A doctor in Latin ought to have read his Cicero and Horace, and all the most important Latin authors, until he is saturated with their thought and language, and with the spirit of their times. A doctor in Greek ought to be so full of his subject as to think in terms of the Greek masters. The candidate in modern literature ought to be saturated with the best product of modern times. And all three ought so to have bridged the chasm that separates us from antiquity, and so to have related the ancient with the modern and the modern with the ancient, that with them a literary education is in real truth "the accumulation upon the present age of the influence of whatever was best and greatest in the life of the past."

The fact is, scholarship in literature hath committed great mistakes—not to use the prophet's rougher word—departing from the literary art, and scholars in literature are themselves in need of education in comparative values. Let us define research and scholarship in literature with less inflexibility. Creative scholarship consists not only in the discovery of relationships between things which already exist; it consists also in the ability to put things together in relation-

ships not before known—that is, in the production of literature itself. New associations of ideas, new means of expression to give them currency—should not these achievements be recognized as equal in importance to dissertations on cooks in Athenaeus or suffixes in Shakespeare?

And besides, let us recognize that the interpretation, appropriation, and production of literature are the logical ends of the study of literature. The chemist studies existing combinations of matter in order to regulate his conduct in the face of existing conditions, and to acquire the power of creating new combinations. Why should not literature—the great art embodying the experience of mankind—be studied with like ends in view: to know what combinations have already been made in thought and expression, and to acquire the power of making and expressing new ones to enter in their turn into the sum of human experience? And why should a dissertation or a seminary activity which is conditioned for the most part on the treatment of poetry as a mine or quarry be accepted as the fulfilment of the doctoral requirement, while good essays, novels, plays, translations, and poetry (I realize that this last is a most daring utterance) are refused? These products, even if no more successful in their way than the orthodox dissertation is in its way, are more sincere, more individual, and more educative; and they may be made as severely disciplinary as the scratching over of two bushels of chaff to find two grains of wheat, for the which you shall search all day ere you find them, and when you have them they are not worth the search. It is no more to be taken for granted that a man with an inclination toward literature will be unable in three years to write something worth while than that a man with the so-called scholarly bent will fail to produce a dissertation whose content shall justify its printing. The stilus is not only *magister dicendi*, but the great master also in the art of thinking.

If, then, the graduate student gives evidence of capacity to do a higher type of work than the dissertation grind, why not let him make the substitution? And if the instructor whose eyes are turned toward promotion has a heart pregnant with celestial fire, and succeeds in really making it flame, why not promote him for it provided he is really an inspiring teacher? The man who can create a fine piece

of architecture ought certainly to be honored as much as the one who is capable of nothing better than neat piles of brick.

I am not forgetting that to the poet alone has never been accorded the privilege of being mediocre, and I would have no one think that I am recommending the publication of all literary substitutions, either in poetry or prose. That would be as intolerable to gods and men as the publication of all dissertations is now. I interpret the prohibition of Horace to be against publishing, not against attempting to write, and I would apply it to both literature *and* dissertations. With a strict construction of the other Horatian principle of locking up your manuscript for nine years before publication, we should be reasonably safe, at least for a limited period.

And as to the printing of so-called scholarly matter on literature after the doctor's degree, if I were a Trebatius, and the would-be scholar came to me saying: "There are those who say that I carry my efforts beyond the limit, and that what I publish has neither value in itself nor interest; what am I to do?"—I should reply: "*Quiescas*—don't publish." "But if I don't publish I shall get no call and no promotion." "Let those who are in that case read three times through the world's greatest classics in prose and poetry, garner what they can, and share the golden treasure with their students, and then go up into the mount and listen for the still small voice of Apollo."

And if he still persisted in gunning for promotion in the old way, I should continue the publication of learned periodicals: only with the proviso that authors pay for advertising space, and contribute the usual 5 per cent. of their first year's salary after a promotion or call; and with the fund thus created I should have the subscribers paid for reading the advertisements. Such an arrangement would enable us to judge with intelligence of the real degree of spontaneity and genuineness in scholars, and might increase the income of many a poor teacher who didn't shrink from hard work on week ends.

Let us summarize the probable effect of a return to emphasis upon literature as the main element in the teaching of literature by all who call themselves teachers of literature.

First, we should attain to something like unity before the public, and cease to be the target for shafts of ridicule and wrath. We should also become more unified in very reality: our teaching, from secondary

school to graduate, would be homogeneous; we should have something like a common body of knowledge, something like community of interests, something like a bond of sympathy. It would be possible for one teacher of literature to converse with another and to understand him, and to read his works. Language and literature associations would have a common bond in reality, instead of in seeming and the reader of a paper on French literature might have a few instructors in Greek or German literature in his audience.

Again, with the placing of proper emphasis upon literature and upon teaching, there would come a measure of alleviation to secondary teachers. The experience of successful teaching ought to be regarded as a valuable addition to the doctor's education, and secondary teaching ought to be an avenue to the college career, instead of a bypath to Doubting Castle and Giant Despair, or a stage on the way to matrimony or money-making.

Thirdly, we should have not only homogeneous instruction, but better instruction. The modification in spirit which has been suggested would breed a race of teachers and scholars with more genuine qualifications. There would still be masters of fact and method, but the Gradgrind—the aptness of whose name tempts one to credit its inventor with prophetic vision of the attitude of American scholarship toward him, and the desire for anticipatory revenge—would find the atmosphere less congenial than now. It would be impossible for men who ought to have been statisticians or engineers to occupy chairs of literature.

Again, with our community of interest in the humanistic side of literary study, and with comparative freedom from the unessential, its breeding of false standards, and its attendant waste of time and energy, we should also have a more mature, a more sincere, and therefore a broader, deeper, and more human scholarship; and because of its better grade we should have fewer typographical manifestations of it; and because of that we should make no inconsiderable gain in time and shelf room, and perhaps save regents and trustees money enough to enable them to bid for a really good professor against rival institutions in the neighborhood, or even where the gorgeous east with richest hand showers on her professors barbaric pearl and gold.

But greatest of all the results of the rehumanization of literature would be the *rapprochement* between life and the literary art. The intimate relation of art to life is not appreciated. Art is not something merely to be placed on exhibition in galleries, museums, and showcases; nor merely something which entails a burdensome obligation upon the membership of women's clubs and others who pursue the phantom culture. It is a part of the business of ordinary life, whether it is so recognized or not. It is a crystallization of the best in human experience; it is sprung from life, and its teachers should see that it gets back into life. To interpret literature, the greatest of all the arts—greatest because it includes all the others—is surely worthy to be the ruling passion of the teacher of literature. To help instill into the lives of the sons and daughters of the nation the purifying, consoling, and ennobling influence of literature, and to make them happier and more contented citizens, is surely no doubtful form of service to the commonwealth.

And finally, if we seek in this way the kingdom of literature, not only shall genuine literary scholarship be added unto us, but we shall be in a position to make something like effective resistance to the advancing ranks of the common foe of all liberal culture. The arch-enemy of literary study is not to be found in the defects of the graduate system, though they give him aid and comfort. The real enemy is to be found in the lack of idealism which characterizes modern education and modern life. In a country where education is sometimes called by observers from abroad the national fetich, it is nevertheless baldly sought after in the spirit of commerce: by technical students, of course; but also by prospective teachers in the schools, who elect nothing but the subjects which in their minds have an immediate value for their tasks or which will bring them recommendations; by graduates, who must have a degree in order to get a college position rather than a place in a secondary school; by instructors who aspire to professorships; and by professors who are after calls. The value of a study is estimated not by its liberalizing influence, but by its immediate usefulness. Culture is copartner with commerce. The idea of it as a necessary constituent in the personality of a lady or gentleman has hardly found lodgment as yet in the minds of the best of our people; and the indispensability of it in the teacher's career,

if we are to judge by what we see, is admitted only by those who define it so loosely that they place on the same level the graduate who is rich in acquaintance with the wisdom of the ages and the graduate who is superintending a line of telephone construction, and who confesses with indifference, if not with pride, like a certain young engineer, that he has never heard of "Sheats and Kelley."

Culture is getting to be as much a rarity among teachers as among other highly specialized professions, and they are as eager as others to take the short cut. The Latin teacher has had no Greek; the modern language teacher in many cases has had neither of the ancient literatures; the prospective teacher of history, economics, English, or science often not only omits Greek and Latin, but takes only a minimum of modern foreign language—and, if the trend does not change, will take none at all. For a year or two of advantage in time, or for a thin and watery acquaintance with some thin and watery subject—we shall soon begin to speak of subjects of the hour, and publish in our catalogues annual lists of the six best elected courses—they sacrifice what time has shown to be of enduring value in education, trading the broader and deeper foundation for a lifetime for mere preparation to teach a first semester in the high school.

And when they have begun to teach, they hand on to their pupils the same conception of liberal culture. They argue for their subjects only on the ground of practical value: for history and economics because they are modern and vital, with the implication that nothing is vital which is not modern; for the modern languages because they may be used in trade; for English because it will help in letter-writing, canvassing, and winning cases; for the sciences because they have to do with material and measurable and therefore practical things.

And meanwhile the teacher of literature, having few or none of these reasons for existence, assumes an apologetic attitude, and writes to ask her old college professor if he can't tell her where to read up on the value of literature. Years of severe study in literature have not taught her the *raison d'être* of liberal culture, or even that authority in such matters is not lodged in the notebook and topical method. While her colleagues are boasting of the practical value of their subjects, and principals and pedagogical lecturers and the press are talking about the usefulness of education, the way to succeed, and topics

of a similar nature, the teacher of the less apparently practical subjects by silence concedes the field—by silence born of little faith, of real suspicion that the study of literature does not pay, or at least of inability to demonstrate its connection with the actual world.

How are teachers of literature to have faith—and if they have it, how are they to demonstrate it—after having been for a lifetime in the atmosphere of an educational system whose catechism from the grades to the graduate school teaches that the chief end of man is to attain to success in specialization and to hold on to it forever, and instills into the mind of the student the idea that he is being educated for success not forty years hence, but four? How can we expect *amphorae* if all our wheels are run by potmakers? Commercialism is a madness; and, I tell you, deserves as well a dark house and a whip as madmen do: and the reason why it is not so punished and cured is, that the lunacy is so ordinary that the whippers are mad too. Yet I profess curing it by counsel.

By counsel. Whatever men may say, literature is the vanguard of culture and the one fortress of idealism besides religion. Every student who has been conducted to the inner shrine of literature is a happier individual and a more contented citizen. If, however, literature is to have this effect, it must be taught with the main emphasis upon interpretation and appropriation. It must be treated as an art, not as a science, and teachers of literature must present a solid front.

In making this plea for unity, and in picturing the potential results of unity, I am laboring under no delusions. I know that there are a great many teachers of literature whose primary interests are in philology and history, and who think that without these the study of literature would not have backbone enough to command respect, who think appreciation a gift of nature, and who think appropriation something to be left more or less to the individual. I shall not stop to argue against these articles of faith, which seem as reposeful to those who hold them as articles of faith usually are. If these persons are perfectly sincere in the views they entertain and in the course they take, perhaps it would be undesirable for them to try to conform to other ideals. The teaching of literature calls for peculiar qualifications; in some hands it might *not* prove a success.

But if those for whom I am spokesman do not ask them to modify their methods and purposes, they do with good right demand a change of attitude. Let the philologist and the historian not impose their idea of scholarship and instruction upon those whose nature and reason tell them that the idea is false. Let them recognize and confess that all scholarship in literature which is not directly literary is to be justified only as it contributes to the interpretation of literature, and that the philologist and historian are not masters, but servants, to those whose main concern is the teaching of literature itself. If they cannot see that original production and criticism are the highest forms of literary scholarship, let them at least grant these activities equal consideration with their own. Let us have an end of the tyranny of those whose main business is with the letter over those who are concerned with the spirit. Dilettantism is dreadful, but the dilettante is no worse than the scholastic Dryasdust. Whatever may be the dilettante's faults—and I hate them with perfect hatred—he at least loves literature for its peculiar message.

My plea resolves itself into one for more freedom for both professor and graduate. Graduate study should be more individual than undergraduate, instead of less. Let the sponsors for the candidate for a higher degree give him what they have in their own garner to give, not what they know, from catalogues, that others give; and let the candidate himself not be stretched upon the bed of Procrustes and tormented into trying to become what he was never intended to be, and prevented from developing toward the full stature of what he *was* intended to be. Let both be judged by their fruits. Let the professor who is by nature humanistic stand forth as a humanist, and let it be known that the doctor of philosophy under him is to be a humanist first of all, and not a German doctor, diluted by an admixture of Yale or Harvard or Johns Hopkins, and that his work is informed by the professor's own spirit rather than by a spirit which the professor thinks is the German spirit. Let the graduate have a torch of his professor's own make and lighting, not a machine-made product, second-hand, burnt out and black, made in Germany and picked up at a bargain.

After all, my words are not addressed with so much hope to those who disagree with me as to those who are in accord. Many a graduate

student and many a graduate instructor are being made unhappy, and many a good teacher and literary scholar are being spoiled, by conscientious effort to conform to an ideal which the present atmosphere of graduate study imposes upon him. To such my mission is, and but for such I would not venture the expression of my thoughts. Let these teachers of literature know that their own ideals are deserving of all commendation, and have the courage to follow them.

In conclusion, to insure myself as much as possible against misunderstanding and misrepresentation, let me summarize in a few words. I believe in scholarship and in the desirability of its alliance with teaching. I believe in specialization, but only if it is based on a broad and firm foundation. I believe in system, but not in the tyranny of a system. I believe in method, but I believe that literature should be treated as an art, not as a science, and that it should be interpreted and appropriated, not merely handled. I believe in the doctor's degree in literature, but not unless it stands for taste and wide knowledge rather than capacity for industry in the collection of data about literature. I believe that the dissertation should be made the vehicle of education, rather than a disciplinary task imposed to meet the demands of a system. I believe that much of what is called scholarship in literature is not that at all. I believe that the highest type of production in the study of literature is literature itself, and that next to it stands the criticism of literature, and that when our activities go beyond those limits the result is a confusion of literature with other fields of study and a state of disunion among its teachers.

And finally, I exhort again those who believe that the study of literature is being abused to have faith in their own ideals and to come out and be separate, and to be dominated no longer by a false conception of literary scholarship, or frightened by the cry of dilettantism. The change which I have recommended is not one to an easier, but to a more difficult programme—as much more difficult than the present programme as art is greater than artificiality, men greater than mechanics, and the body more than raiment. It is a change, too, which is coming, and is even now on the way. The spirit of independence is rising,

cui si concedere nolis,
multa poetarum veniet manus, auxilio quae
sit mihi (nam multo plures sumus) ac veluti te
Iudaei *cogemus* in hanc concedere turbam.